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NSC STAFF FOR WATERS

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SUBJECT: EGYPT: REACTION TO PRESIDENT BUSH'S PRAGUE SPEECH

CLASSIFIED BY DCM STUART JONES FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT, AND GOVERNMENT-DOMINATED MEDIA, HAVE REJECTED PRESIDENT BUSH'S JUNE 5 SPEECH IN PRAGUE, PARTICULARLY THE CALL FOR THE RELEASE OF AYMAN NOUR. THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND THE PARLIAMENT'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE TOOK EXCEPTION TO THE REFERENCE TO AYMAN NOUR. THE STATE-CONTROLLED MEDIA HAVE TAKEN A SIMILAR TACK, WHILE INDEPENDENT COMMENTATORS HAVE QUESTIONED IF USG ACTIONS TO PROMOTE DEMOCRACY CAN BE COMMENSURATE TO THE PRESIDENTS WORDS. GAMEELA ISMAIL, WIFE OF AYMAN NOUR, SAID SHE FEARED THAT THE REMARKS WOULD NEGATIVELY AFFECT NOUR'S CHANCES OF JUDICIAL RELEASE. END SUMMARY.

GOE PIQUE

¶2. (SBU) IN A JUNE 5 STATEMENT, FOREIGN MINISTER ABOUL GHEIT TERMED THE CALL FOR AYMAN NOUR'S RELEASE AS "UNACCEPTABLE INTERFERENCE IN OUR DOMESTIC AFFAIRS," BUT NOTED THAT THE STRENGTH AND DEPTH OF U.S.-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS ALLOWED HIM TO EXPRESS HIS ASTONISHMENT AND RESENTMENT OVER PRESIDENT BUSH'S SPEECH. FOLLOWING ABOUL GHEIT'S LEAD, THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE AT THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ISSUED A STATEMENT ON JUNE 6 EXPRESSING "DEEP SADNESS" AT PRESIDENT BUSH'S "FLAGRANT INTERFERENCE" IN EGYPT'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS, AND URGED THAT PRESIDENT BUSH SHOULD INSTEAD ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN GUANTANAMO.

ECHOES IN THE ESTABLISHMENT MEDIA

¶3. (SBU) KHAYRI RAMADAN AND AMR ADEEB, THE INFLUENTIAL AND POPULAR HOSTS OF THE "CAIRO TODAY" PROGRAM ON THE PRIVATE ORBIT SATELLITE CHANNEL, CRITICIZED THE SPEECH. RAMADAN ADDED THAT "REGARDING AYMAN NOUR, ALL OF US ADVOCATE DEMOCRACY IN OUR COUNTRY AND WE ARE DEMANDING IT ALL THE TIME FROM OUR RULERS IN OUR OWN WAY RATHER THAN BY PRESSURES FROM BUSH. THE USA, WHICH WAS A SYMBOL FOR FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY, HAS BECOME ... A SYMBOL OF OPPRESSION, SUPPRESSION, AND TYRANNY." REGARDING SPECULATION THAT NOUR MIGHT SOON BE GRANTED AMNESTY BY PRESIDENT MUBARAK, ADEEB SAID THAT NOW PEOPLE MIGHT THINK THAT "BUSH ... (HAS) RUINED NOUR.... BUSH HURLED A STONE AT (NOUR'S) HEAD."

¶4. (C) ROSE AL-YOUSSEF, THE "INDEPENDENT" DAILY BELIEVED TO BE FUNDED BY NDP SECRETARY FOR ORGANIZATION, AHMED EZZ (WHO CONTROLS MUCH OF THE EGYPTIAN STEEL INDUSTRY AND IS CLOSE TO

GAMAL MUBARAK), RAN A FRONT PAGE STORY ON JUNE 7 HEADLINED, "THE FOOL--A PRESIDENT WHO HAS LOST HIS MIND--BUSH'S CONSPIRACY ON AYMAN NOUR--THE U.S. PRESIDENT HAS STILL NOT LEARNED THAT WESTERN STATEMENTS HAVE NO IMPACT ON EGYPTIAN DECISIONS."

GAMEELA ISMAIL REACTION

15. (SBU) IN AN INTERVIEW PUBLISHED ON JUNE 7, NOUR'S WIFE, GAMEELA ISMAIL, TOLD LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY AL-MASRY AL-YOUM THAT SHE HOPED THAT STATEMENTS BY PRESIDENT BUSH AND OTHER WORLD LEADERS MIGHT HAVE "PRACTICAL" RESULTS. ISMAIL SAID SHE DID NOT BELIEVE PREVIOUS PRESS REPORTS THAT VP CHENEY HAD RAISED NOUR'S CASE WITH MUBARAK DURING HIS MAY 13 VISIT TO CAIRO. ISMAIL ADDED THAT "WHAT I FEAR MOST IS THAT BUSH'S STATEMENT WILL NEGATIVELY AFFECT AYMAN'S ... CHANCES OF A MEDICAL RELEASE THROUGH A JUDICIAL RULING." (NOTE: NOUR HAS A JUNE 12 HEARING AT EGYPT'S STATE COUNCIL, WHERE A RULING IS EXPECTED ON HIS APPEAL FOR MEDICAL PAROLE. MINISTER OF INTERIOR ADLY TOLD THE AMBASSADOR ON JUNE 5 THAT NOUR WOULD NOT BE RELEASED BEFORE THE END OF HIS FIVE YEAR JAIL TERM.)

DEMOCRACY ACTIVIST ENGY EL-HADDAD

16. (C) ENGY EL-HADDAD, A CLOSE EMBASSY CONTACT AND MEPI GRANTEE WHO WAS NAMED ON THE WHITE HOUSE FACT SHEET AS THE ONE EGYPTIAN DISSIDENT/DEMOCRACY ACTIVIST WHO HAD MET WITH PRESIDENT BUSH, TOLD POLOFF ON JUNE 6 THAT "I ACTUALLY LIKED THE SPEECH," BUT ALSO URGED THAT THE USG SHOULD MATCH THE PRESIDENT'S WORDS WITH MEANINGFUL ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE

STRONG RHETORIC. SHE SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT'S REFERENCE TO AYMAN NOUR, UNFORTUNATELY, WOULD NOT MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT THIS POINT.

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS BAHEY EL-DIN HASSAN AND HOSSAM BAHGAT

17. (SBU) HASSAN, ONE OF THE DEANS OF EGYPT'S CIVIL SOCIETY COMMUNITY, TOLD AL-MASRY AL-YOUM IN AN INTERVIEW PUBLISHED ON JUNE 7, THAT THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS REVEALED THE "TOTAL CONTRADICTIONS THAT GOVERN U.S. POLICY." HASSAN OPINED THAT THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION IS FACING INTERNAL CONFLICTS OVER HOW TO BALANCE DEMOCRACY PROMOTION WITH ITS GEO-STRATEGIC INTERESTS. WHEN THE ADMINISTRATION APPEARS TO DE-EMPHASIZE DEMOCRACY DUE TO STRATEGIC CONCERNS, THE ADMINISTRATION "FACES STRONG AND SARCASTIC CRITICISM FROM THE MEDIA AND TRIES TO REMEDY THIS BY MAKING TOUGH STATEMENTS AGAINST ITS DICTATORIAL ALLIES." BY THE SAME TOKEN, HASSAN CONTINUED, USG POLICY IMPERATIVES IN PALESTINE, IRAQ, AND IRAN COMPEL THE USG OCCASIONALLY "TO COMPLIMENT THE ARAB REGIMES WHICH PRESERVE AND PROTECT U.S. INTERESTS." HASSAN CONCLUDED THAT THE GOE WOULD RESIST USG PRESSURE TO RELEASE NOUR BECAUSE THE GOE PREFERS TO KEEP NOUR AS AN OBJECT LESSON FOR OTHER ASPIRING INDEPENDENT CONTENDERS FOR THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENCY. IN ADDITION, THE GOE KNOWS THAT THE USG'S WEAKENED REGIONAL POSITION "GIVES LEVERAGE TO THE EGYPTIAN REGIME IN THE GAME OF POLITICAL BROKERAGE."

18. (C) BAHGAT, PERHAPS THE PRE-EMINENT EGYPTIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST OF THE NEW GENERATION (HE IS IN HIS LATE 20S), TOLD POLOFF ON JUNE 7, "I LIKE THE WORDS. BUT WE'VE HEARD ALL THIS AND MORE TWO YEARS AGO, AND HERE WE ARE. LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE IS STILL THE KEY, AND THE U.S. IS STILL REALLY LAGGING BEHIND IN THIS AREA."

RICCIARDONE